

## Summary

This factsheet intends to briefly introduce the subject of multimedia records and offer some basic advice. You will discover:

- What is meant by multimedia records
- Some approaches to consider for managing multimedia records
- Where to look for further guidance

## What records do we mean?

When thinking of the records which you create or receive during the course of your work, we tend to think of those held in a paper format or those held electronically on a network storage area or stand alone computer. These tend to be textual in nature. However, you should avoid thinking of records as being defined only by physical format or textual content. You may well hold other material which could also be termed as records, such as photos, videos, DVDs, audio-guides and CDs. Regardless of the format, records should all be managed to an appropriate standard.

This factsheet acts principally as a reminder that you should consider these non-traditional items to fit the definition of a 'record' and subsequently consider if they hold long term value from an archival standpoint. It is very important that you liaise with the Diocesan Record Office you use to deposit your archives as colleagues there may be able to offer further advice on managing any multimedia records you have and will be able to discuss what facilities they have for managing such records.

When looking at the management of non-traditional formats, some sensible approaches can also be gleaned from other factsheets in this series, details of which are given at the end of this factsheet.

It should be noted that this factsheet does not offer guidance on the storage of electronic records (i.e. word processed documents) on portable storage devices, such as CDs and USB memory sticks. Consult the factsheet titled "Looking after your electronic records" for guidance on this. In short, such devices should be strictly limited and avoided altogether for storing sensitive information. Electronic records should ideally be stored on a shared network drive where they are accessible to all users necessary and are covered by routine backup and disaster recovery procedures.

## Tips for managing multimedia records

The lifespan of these formats will be determined by various factors, including how they are handled, manufacturing quality and environmental considerations. Of course, concerns about technological obsolescence may also need to be addressed and it is important that due consideration is given to the general organisation of such records to ensure they are a useful resource.

What follows is a set of basic tips which may help in the management of multimedia records, but it does not act as a comprehensive guide. There will be concerns specific to each format and in each case it would be appropriate to consult specialist advice.

## **Organisation**

As discussed in the factsheet “Organising your records”, it is important to organise records in a logical and consistent manner. Amongst other benefits, this will ensure that records can be located when necessary. Multimedia records are no exception and consideration should be given as to how they are arranged and stored within your office. There is a danger that formats such as CDs and DVDs can sometimes get lost within paper files or individual desk drawers. You may wish to keep all such records in a single storage cabinet if possible and arrange them into logical groupings (e.g. alphabetical order, subject groupings). Photographs may also be stored as part of paper filing systems. This may be appropriate in some instances, but careful thought should be given to their preservation and ensuring they are not at risk of loss or damage. You may consider organising groups of photos into appropriate photograph albums.

When deciding how to organise the multimedia records you hold, it would be useful to compile an inventory of them. Broadly speaking it is generally of little use holding such material if you do not know what you are holding, i.e. what is actually on each CD or DVD. The exercise of compiling an inventory is made harder if they are unlabelled. In such instances the only way to identify the content would be to view them, which is obviously time consuming. It is therefore recommended that records are correctly labelled when they are created.

## **Storage environment**

The environment in which you store multimedia records can accelerate any process of deterioration and this may result in irreversible damage to an item. For example, if the environment is too damp, mould may develop, and if it is too dry, an item such as a photo may become brittle. Storage should be safe from fire, flood, theft and unauthorised access. It is recommended to use open shelving to allow circulation of air and you should avoid putting items on the floor or against an external wall because these areas may be damp. If you hold videos these should be stored away from magnets, including speakers.

You should also avoid attics and basements as these areas are more prone to extremes or fluctuations in temperatures. Digital media (i.e. CDs, DVDs) ideally should be held at a temperature between 18C-22C, with a relative humidity between 35-45%. The ideal for photographs is between 14C-16C, and relative humidity of 30-40%. Generally speaking though, fluctuations and extreme temperatures are problematic and stable conditions are favoured. Storage should be cool, dry and dark.

Exposure to dust, dirt and direct sunlight should be avoided, so it is appropriate to store records in covers for protection. Discs and tapes should be stored in inert plastic cases and always be tightly closed. Photographs should ideally be held in files of archival quality. These may be paper or plastic, but would be free from acid, sulphur and peroxides. You should avoid acidic paper envelopes, rubber bands and paper clips when storing photos.

Storage areas should be regularly checked to ensure that they are not subject to damp, mould and pest infestation.

## Handling

Handling these items should be kept to a minimum where possible and ensure when doing so that you have clean hands, and food and drink are kept away from close proximity. You should be careful about passing on dirt and dust as these could cause degradation of the item.

Hold CDs and DVDs at the outer edge or by the centre hole, not touching the shiny surface and never bending or scratching. When labelling the contents of a disc, do so on the case, not by writing on the actual disc. If you do need to clean them, do so with a clean cotton fabric, in a straight line from the centre towards the outer edge. Specialist cleaning equipment can be obtained, but you should avoid strong cleaners, abrasives, solvents or acids. When handling videos make sure you do not touch the actual tape inside the video. Importantly, do not leave discs or videos in playback equipment unnecessarily, but always ensure they are put back in their boxes after viewing.

The playback equipment you use should also be carefully handled and well maintained. If it is dirty, the dirt and dust may pass onto the item and debris could cause scratches. Dust can also transfer from a disc or tape onto playback equipment.

Photos should be carefully supported with both hands, and if fragile, stiff card may act as a useful support. Avoid touching the image surface as this would result in fingerprints and oily stains. If you do need to label a photo, do so by writing on the back of the image with an HB pencil, not ink. Never try to repair a photo with self-adhesive tape.

## Technological obsolescence and digital preservation

In a rapidly evolving technological environment, decisions should be made on the most appropriate storage methods to use in order to ensure that items can be accessible for as long as necessary. Whilst the correct storage environment and handling procedures can prolong the lifespan of a CD, DVD or video, it is possible the hardware or software needed to access the item may become obsolete. Think back to the use of floppy disks, which many computers will no longer allow to be read today.

One strategy to put in place is to read and inspect items at regular intervals and possibly consider sometimes refreshing a disc (i.e. copying the data onto a new disc every few years). But you may also consider the migration of data to other formats (e.g. transfer videos to DVD, or CDs and DVDs to a network storage area). Transfer to a networked storage area has the benefit of making the content accessible to multiple users at once and ensuring the file is covered by routine back-up and disaster recovery procedures. However, there are many unanswered questions over the issue of digital preservation and so any decision or strategy proposed must be carefully investigated and planned to ensure it is the correct decision for your place of work and the records in question. A strategy would need to address issues such as how long the record needs to be retained, how vulnerable the format is to obsolescence and whether the item is regularly used.

It is worth noting that digitisation of historical photographs has become widespread. Whilst this reduces the handling of the original image you must be careful not to damage the original photograph in the digitisation process. You must also consider if issues of technological obsolescence mean that the original image may well last longer than the technology needed to view the digitised image.

## Specialist guidance

It is essential to seek specialist advice and assistance when multimedia records have become damaged. If you attempt to make repairs yourself you may risk the damage becoming irreversible. This factsheet has only given some very basic guidance to bear in mind when managing multimedia records generally. For more detailed guidance, we would advise that you consult the websites of the National Archives (<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk>) and British Library (<http://www.bl.uk>), and again suggest that you should liaise with your relevant Diocesan Record Office.

## Factsheets available in the records management toolkit

- What is records management
- Organising your records
- Looking after your paper records
- Looking after your electronic records
- Looking after your emails
- Looking after your multimedia records
- Agreements with record offices
- Access to records
- Data protection
- Copying and copyright
- Glossary

## Further guidance

For further advice please contact the Church of England Record Centre:

15 Galleywall Road, South Bermondsey, London, SE16 3PB.

020 7898 1030

[archives@churchofengland.org](mailto:archives@churchofengland.org)

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